

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Previously Presented) A tissue ablation system, comprising:
  - an elongate member having a proximal end and a distal end;
  - a ground electrode element mounted to the distal end of the elongate member, the ground electrode element being exposed to contact bodily fluid;
  - a protective element mounted to the distal end of the elongate member, wherein the protective element at least partially covers the ground electrode element to prevent the ground electrode element from contacting adjacent solid tissue; and
  - an ablation electrode element configured for being positioned adjacent a target tissue region, wherein electrical energy conveyed between the ablation electrode element and the ground electrode element ablates the target tissue region without ablating the solid tissue adjacent the ground electrode element.
2. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element comprises a cage assembly.
3. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 2, wherein the cage assembly includes a proximal end, a distal end, and a plurality of struts secured between the proximal end and the distal end.
4. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 2, wherein the cage assembly comprises a ring element that coaxially surrounds and is slidable relative to the elongate member.

5. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 4, wherein one of the proximal end and the distal end of the cage assembly comprises the ring element, and the other of the proximal end and distal end is fixedly secured to the elongate member.

6. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 5, wherein the proximal end of the cage assembly comprises the ring element, and the distal end of the cage assembly is fixedly secured to the elongate member.

7. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 5, wherein the distal end of the cage assembly comprises the ring element, and the proximal end of the cage assembly is fixedly secured to the elongate member.

8. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, further comprising a sleeve having a lumen in which the elongate member is slidably disposed.

9. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element has an expanded configuration when outside the lumen of the sleeve, and a collapsed configuration when inside the lumen of the sleeve.

10. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element is made from an electrically non-conductive material.

11. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element comprises a braided or woven structure.

12. (Cancelled).

13. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, further comprising a steering mechanism for steering the distal end of the elongate member.

14. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the elongate member is a catheter member.

15-17. (Cancelled).

18. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element circumscribes the ground electrode element.

19. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A method of treating, comprising:  
inserting an elongated member carrying a ground electrode element in the body;  
placing an ablative electrode element adjacent solid tissue;  
contacting the ground electrode element with bodily fluid;  
maintaining a distance between the ground electrode element and the solid tissue  
using a protective element that circumscribes at least a portion of the electrode element;  
and

conveying electrical energy between the ablative electrode element and the ground electrode element, wherein the target tissue region is ablated and the solid tissue adjacent the ground electrode element is not ablated.

20. (Withdrawn-Previously Presented) The method of claim 19, wherein the ground electrode element is carried at a distal end of an elongate member, and the inserting comprises inserting the distal end of the elongate member into the body.

21. (Withdrawn-Previously Amended) The method of claim 19, wherein the protective element comprises a cage assembly.

22 (Withdrawn-Previously Presented) The method of claim 19, wherein the ground electrode element is intravascularly inserted into the body.

23. (Withdrawn-Previously Presented) The method of claim 19, wherein the ground electrode element is inserted into a heart chamber, the ablative electrode element is placed outside of the heart chamber, and the electrical energy is conveyed through a heart wall between the ablative electrode element and the ground electrode element.

24. (Withdrawn-Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, wherein the ablative electrode element is placed in another heart chamber while the electrical energy is conveyed between the ablative electrode element and the ground electrode element.

25. (Withdrawn-Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, wherein the ablative electrode element is placed outside of the heart while the electrical energy is conveyed between the ablative electrode element and the ground electrode element.